

Zoning Commission Testimony – Lilian Noya

ZC Case No. 24-15 – 901 Monroe Street NE

1. Opening & Introduction

Good afternoon Commissioners,

My name is Lilian Noya. I am a licensed architect, and I live within 200 feet of the proposed development site at 901 Monroe Street NE. I am here to express my strong concerns regarding this project's design and encourage changes to the proposed plan — particularly regarding the building's massing, sunlight impact, and traffic circulation.

2. Architectural Massing & Context

First, I would like to address the building's architectural massing, which is likely to have a profound effect on the surrounding area and its residents.

The current proposal maintains a full 75-foot height along its eastern edge, creating a sheer wall effect — a vertical cliff only a few feet from residential porches. The 6th floor setback in the proposed plan will not alleviate this effect. This will not only disrupt the neighborhood's aesthetic, but it will also create an overwhelming presence looming over the nearby residents and even the pedestrians passing by.

This fundamental design flaw was also recognized over a decade ago. The 2012 architectural testimony highlighted similar concerns: overwhelming scale and disregard for Brookland's village-like development pattern. That version of the building was rightly opposed by the 200-Footers in 2012. However, today's design actually intensifies those same flaws with more height and fewer concessions. (ZC Case 10-28 — included as Exhibit 340)

A thoughtful response could have corrected this major flaw. Unfortunately, such a correction was never made. However, you *can* find examples of a better solution in the surrounding area.

For instance, the applicant would like to compare their proposal to a different building, Monroe Street Market Block E, which has close proximity to surrounding two-story homes. *That* building better handles this massing problem by transitioning down to four stories before reaching the adjacent single-family homes. It also uses massing adjustments to reduce visual and physical impact. That is not what's happening in the applicant's proposed building, which maintains its full height along the entirety of the street. (Exhibit 19, Figure 8)

At a bare minimum, the applicant must step down some portion of the sheer wall along 10th street.

3. Sunlight & Solar Impacts

Next, I would like to address the building's sunlight and solar impact, especially on the two-story rowhouses both on 9th Street and on 10th Street.

The applicant's shadow study shows how this project will significantly reduce sunlight to adjacent homes — particularly during fall and winter, when outdoor light is valuable and already limited. However, the applicant has not provided year-round shadow studies which would likely reveal a much larger sunlight impact based on the building's mass. We should assume the sunlight impact will be much greater than stated.

This not only affects residents' quality-of-life but also impacts the environment. At least three of the six homes along 10th Street have solar panels, with a fourth home scheduled for installation this year. These residents have made personal investments aligned with DC's clean energy goals — and this building will block their solar exposure for much of the year, driving up energy costs and harming the environment.

For the adjacent residences, this impact has a measurable financial cost. Personal solar panels can generate a home thousands of dollars a year. If changes reducing the sunlight impact are not made, the developer must take responsibility and reimburse the surrounding residents for these future financial losses.

A reduction in massing and weight would be a much more sustainable solution to this problem.

4. Traffic, Alley Access, Aesthetics & Community Use

Finally, from an architectural and urban design standpoint, the most problematic element of this project is its exclusive reliance on a dead-end alley for all vehicular access.

Every car, delivery van, and trash truck will have to enter through a narrow alley behind our homes, navigate a mid-block garage entrance, and then exit the same way they arrived. There is no circulation loop, no buffer zone, and no off-site loading. Trucks will need to reverse or perform tight turns in an alley that is already used by pedestrians — many of them children. (Exhibit 11)

The applicant must provide a safer and more realistic traffic plan for the alley or, preferably, use the existing curb-cut on 9th Street instead, which the Commission approved in 2012.

The alley also represents a potential aesthetic nightmare. Detailed renderings of this area are limited and it is safe to assume that the typical features of a large building will be present. Those of us adjacent to the alley will be staring into a garage opening, mechanical vents, and parked cars just feet from our porches. This is typically the portion of a building where developers are least likely to invest in human-friendly features— but for us, it's the backdrop for our personal and family lives. The developer should pledge to invest in this area as if it were the intimate surroundings of its neighbors, because it is.

5. Conclusion & Request

I respectfully ask that the Commission not approve this project in its current form. Instead, I urge you to require:

- A reduction in massing and height along the side adjacent to the 10th Street townhomes;
- A safer and more realistic traffic plan for the alley; and
- Thoughtful design attention to the alley-facing façade;

This is not a wholesale rejection of development. It is a request for better design — one that respects its neighbors, reflects urban best practices, and minimizes detrimental impacts on the environment and real human beings.

Thank you.